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YEMEN
Poverty and Conflict
The Contemporary Middle East Series
ROUTLEDGE

"*Yemen: Poverty and Conflict* is an outstanding work by an author with profound knowledge of the country and will endure as essential reading for all interested in the future of Yemen."

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Yemen

Focusing on the fundamental reasons underlying the lasting crisis of the Yemeni Civil War, this book frames contemporary Yemen and assesses prospects beyond the conflict, identifying the factors which will determine its future internal and international characteristics.

Building on Helen Lackner's profound experience in Yemen, this volume discusses Yemen's history and state formation, the main political institutions emerging since the Republic of Yemen was established and their role in the war, including the significance of current fragmentation. The volume goes on to discuss climate change, including the water scarcity issue, in the context of resource constraints to economic development and the role of migration. Rural and urban life, as well as the impact of international development and humanitarian aid, are also covered, together with Yemen's international relations – its interaction with its neighbours as well as Western states. Looking forward, this volume suggests the type of policies able to give Yemenis the conditions needed for a reasonable standard of living.

Thanks to analysis of determining events, the book will appeal to politicians, diplomats, humanitarian organizations, security analysts, researchers on the Middle East and those generally interested in Yemen. It will also be an essential text for students of international relations, political economy, failing states, development studies and contemporary Middle Eastern history.

Helen Lackner is Associate Researcher, Middle East Institute, SOAS, and Visiting Fellow at the European Council for Foreign Relations (ECFR).

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Yemen

Poverty and Conflict

Helen Lackner

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Cover image: © Helen Lackner

First published 2023
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-18049-2 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-18050-8 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-05931-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9780429059315

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Newgen Publishing UK

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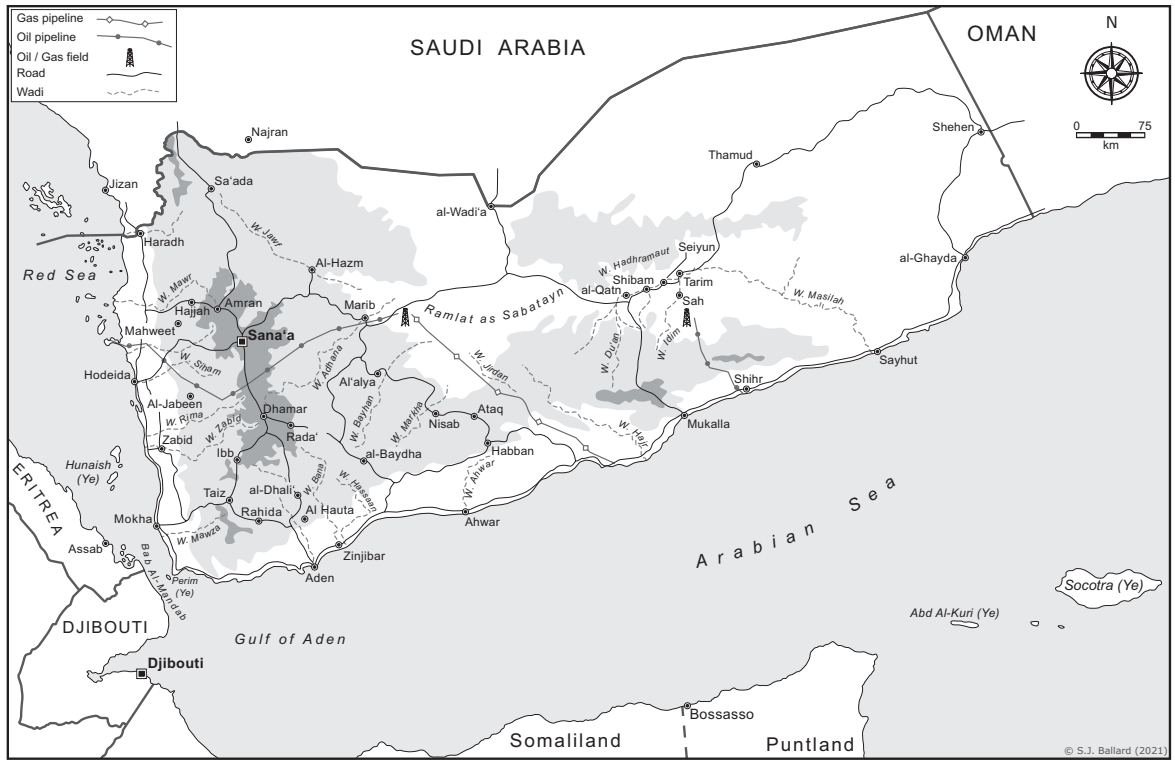

Map 1 Topography and infrastructure of the Republic of Yemen
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Map 2 Governorates of the Republic of Yemen
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Abbreviations

AQAP	al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CBY	Central Bank of Yemen
CPO	Central Planning Organization
DPW	Dubai Ports World
EUR	Euro
FLOSY	Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GARWSS	General Authority for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation
GBP	British Pound Sterling
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRG	Internationally Recognised Government
JMP	Joint Meeting Parties
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MBS	Mohammed bin Salman
MBZ	Mohammed bin Zayed
MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NDF	National Democratic Front
NLF	National Liberation Front
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PNPA	Peace and National Partnership Agreement
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PWP	Public Works Project
RALP	Rainfed Agriculture and Livestock Project
RoY	Republic of Yemen
SFD	Social Fund for Development

SPC	Supreme People's Council (parliament of the PDRY)
SPC	Supreme Political Council (in Huthi-controlled area since 2016)
SR	Saudi Riyal
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNVIM	United National Verification and Inspection Mechanism
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YR	Yemeni Riyal
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

Chronology

Date	*Event*
700 000 BC	First signs of human presence in Wadi Du'an
7000 BC	Oldest rock paintings in Sa'ada, Neolithic stone tools in Rub' al Khali, Khawlan, domestication of livestock
3300–1200 BC	Bronze Age: highland-enclosed villages, irrigated agriculture, earliest idols
1200–700 BC	Ancient south Arabian language, first appearance of writing in southern Arabia, first mention of Saba in ancient Assyrian texts, first stone architecture, first monumental inscriptions
700–110 BC	Caravan kingdoms, Sabaean hegemony; first Hadhramaut domination, Qa'taban dynasty, early south Arabian coins; high period of south Arabian art, Arab tribes arrive in Jawf, emergence of Himyarite era
100–300 AD	Sabaean restoration, Abyssinians occupy western Yemen, Hadhramaut Empire success, Himyarite kings take Saba
300–500	Himyarite Empire, control all south Arabia, Marib dam restored
500–570	Christian and Jewish kingdoms; Abyssinian domination, including Abraha who transfers the capital to Sana'a; construction of the Sana'a cathedral; final repairs of Marib dam
575–632	Abyssinian king overthrown by Persian domination
628	Islam arrives in Yemen
625–75	Abyssinian occupation of Yemen
630–32	Yemen joins the Islamic state established by Mohammed in Medina
800–1200	Ibadhi domination in Hadhramaut, Zuraydi dynasty in Aden
820	Zabid founded
898	Zaydi imamate founded in Yemen, lasts until 1962

Date	*Event*
1045–1138	Sulayhids
1173–1222	Ayyubids
1229–1454	Rasulids
1454–1526	Tahirids
1528–1636	Ottoman domination in parts of Yemen
1636–1849	Zaydi imamate dominates parts of Yemen
1839	Britain occupies Aden
1850–78	Hadhramaut wars between Kathiri and Qu'ayti
1849–1918	Ottomans occupy Yemen
1904	Mutawakkilite Imam Yahya comes to power in Sana'a
1905	Anglo-Ottoman treaty on the borders, ratified in 1914
1911	Treaty of Da'an between Imam Yahya and Ottomans giving the Imam almost full independence
1934	Treaty of Taif, between King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud and Imam Yahya, agrees on timed contract basis Yemen's northern border, giving the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia control over Asir, Najran and Jizan for 40 years
	Border agreement between Imam Yahya and the British
1944	Establishment of the Free Yemeni movement
1945	Yemen joins the Arab League
1947	Legislative council established in Aden
1948	Imam Yahya assassinated, Imam Ahmad takes over, sacking of Sana'a, Ahmed moves capital to Taiz; major labour strikes in Aden
1952	Egypt: free officers overthrow monarchy; two years later Gamal Abdul Nasser becomes leader
1958	Mutawakkilite imamate in Sana'a joins Egypt and Syria to form the United Arab States, dissolved in 1961
1959	Creation of the Federation of South Arabian Emirates
1962	Death of Imam Ahmad; revolution of 26 September creates the Yemen Arab Republic; establishment of South Arabian Federation with the inclusion of Aden
1962–70	Civil war between royalists supported by Saudi Arabia and UK against the republicans supported by Nasser's Egypt, republic survives
1963–67	Anti-colonial armed struggle in Aden and the Protectorates
1967	June War, Egypt defeated, Aden uprising against UK, independence of the PRSY
1967–68	Siege of Sana'a by royalists fails to dislodge republicans
1969	Left of the National Liberation Front wins power struggle in the PRSY

Date	*Event*
1970	PRSY renamed People's Democratic Republic of Yemen; Saudi military attacks; Agrarian reform in PDRY
1972	First intra-Yemeni war, leads to unity agreement
1974	Ibrahim al Hamdi leads 'coup', becomes president of the YAR
1976	Establishment of Diplomatic relations between PDRY and KSA
1977	Ibrahim al Hamdi assassinated prior to travel to PDRY to announce unity
1978	President al Ghashmi assassinated, Ali Abdullah Saleh becomes president of YAR; President Salmine in Aden executed, establishment of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP)
1979	Second intra-Yemeni war, leads to unity agreement
1980	Ali Nasser Mohammed becomes president and secretary general of YSP, in addition to his earlier position as prime minister in PDRY, Abdul Fattah Ismail goes into exile
1982	YAR: General People's Congress (GPC) created
1984	YAR: Commercial quantities of oil discovered in Marib
1985	PDRY: Abdul Fattah Ismail returns to Aden from Soviet Union; power struggle
1986	PDRY:13 January 'events', short civil war, Ali Nasser Mohammed and supporters, including Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi exiled in Sana'a; Ali Salem al Beedh becomes Secretary General of YSP
1990	22 May: Unification of PDRY and YAR into the Republic of Yemen (RoY); Ali Abdullah Saleh president, Ali Salem al Beedh vice president Iraq invades Kuwait; ROY votes against use of force at UNSC; leads to loss of international development aid and return of 800 000 Yemenis from GCC states; creation of Islah party
1991	Zaydi revival movement starts in far north of RoY; commercial quantities of oil discovered in Hadhramaut;
1993	Parliamentary elections
1994	Civil war: Al Beedh announces re-establishment of separate state in Aden; defeated by Saleh forces aided by former exiles. RoY constitution amended to increase presidential power

Date	*Event*
1995	RoY accepts IMF advice, introduces structural adjustment policies; foreign aid returns
1999	Presidential elections; Ali Abdullah Saleh elected
2000	RoY and Saudi Arabia sign Jeddah treaty agreeing permanent borders; USS Cole attacked in Aden port by al Qa'eda
2001	First elections of local councils; after 9/11 Saleh rushes to support Bush's 'war against terror'
2003	Formation of Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), by Islah, YSP, Nasserites, Popular Forces, Baath party and al Haq party; second parliamentary elections
2004	First Huthi war: Husayn Badr al-Din al Huthi killed
2006	Formation of the Southern Military Retirees Organisation
2011	Popular uprisings demanding downfall of Saleh regime, jobs, dignity and end to corruption; UNSC resolution 2014 supports Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative on transfer of power
2012	Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi elected president for two-year transitional period; Saleh remains head of GPC; International community pledges USD 8.4 billion development aid
2013–14	National Dialogue Conference agrees 1800 'outcomes'; Presidential Committee agrees on six-region federation; Huthi movement expands its geographical control
2014	Huthi movement take Sana'a thanks to support from Saleh; Peace and National Partnership Agreement signed between transitional government and Huthis; new government formed
2015	Huthi full take-over in Sana'a; Hadi announces Aden Temporary Capital, Huthi–Saleh forces attack Aden, leading to Hadi escaping to Riyadh, Saudi-led Coalition launches 'Decisive Storm' operation to restore government to power; UAE and local troops expel Huthi–Saleh forces from Aden; UNSC votes resolution 2216 limiting its mediation potential
2016	Kuwait failed peace negotiations last three months; Huthi–Saleh establish Supreme Political Council and Government of National Salvation in Sana'a; Hadi appoints Ali Mohsen as vice president; deadliest air strike on the Great Hall in Sana'a kills more than 140

Date	*Event*
2017	Formation of UAE-supported Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Aden, challenges authority of Hadi's Internationally Recognised Government (IRG); Huthis kill Saleh in Sana'a; Yemen first described by UN as the 'worst Humanitarian crisis in the world'
2018	Coalition offensive on Hodeida interrupted by international intervention; UN-sponsored Stockholm Agreement leads to Hodeida cease-fire
2019	STC expel IRG from Aden; Saudis negotiate the Riyadh Agreement between the two factions; UAE 'withdraws' most troops from Yemen; increase in Huthi missile attacks on Saudi Arabia; largest UN Humanitarian support financed (USD 3.9 billion)
2020	Huthi offensive in north-east breaks lasting stalemate; a year after Riyadh agreement, new government formed and arrives in Aden, but differences between STC and IRG remain active; UN Humanitarian plan receives half of requirement (USD 2 billion); humanitarian situation worsens throughout the country
2021	Huthis renew offensive on Marib; Biden administration appoints special envoy, announces interruption of arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE; UN appoints new special envoy

Preface

The inclusion of this volume in the Contemporary Middle East Series is a reminder to all that Yemen is, indeed, part of the Middle East, however defined. This is important as the country is so often ignored in discussions of the region, whether cultural, economic, political or historical. This neglect in both Western and Arab discourse is surprising: a country with 30 million Arabic speaking people, a millennial history, an extraordinarily varied geography and diverse landscapes, and control of one of the world's major international sea routes, should receive more attention, despite not being a significant hydrocarbon exporter. Even the current conflict, which as of 2022 Yemenis have been suffering for more than seven years, has received so little international attention that, when mentioned, it is frequently described as 'the forgotten war'. This is the case despite the UN, since 2017, stating that the war has caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Reader, welcome to Yemen. Despite the subtitle of this book being eminently apt, given that the country has been riven by conflict for decades, even centuries, and is by far the poorest in the Middle East, those who have had the opportunity of visiting Yemen and meeting its people know that it is beautiful with a long history and culture, unique in the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East. Yemenis are generous and hospitable despite the extraordinarily difficult physical, economic and political environment in which they have survived throughout history. This book, focused on politics, economics and society, has unfortunately little room for many of the most wonderful features of the country, but I hope that understanding these aspects will encourage you to follow up and investigate the country's archaeology, music, poetry, architecture and other elements of its culture, which will reveal Yemen's most agreeable features. I also hope that, in the not-too-distant future, you will be able to travel there and visit the multiplicity of sceneries, towns, villages, ancient sites and Islamic monuments dispersed throughout the country and to meet Yemenis.

My work on this book has benefitted enormously from help, advice and information from and discussions with a number of people, most of whom prefer to remain anonymous. They know who they are and how grateful I am

for all the help given. As is customary, I remain responsible for any errors and all interpretations of events. Transliteration primarily uses the more common English usage of names and has no pretence to being scientific; only ‘ayn is represented as here. Hopefully this makes the book easier to read. Good reading.

Oxford, November 2021

Introduction

In 2021, in addition to the Huthi military offensive in Marib in the north-east of the country, the main claim to fame for Yemen is its official position as the UN's 'worst humanitarian crisis', a concept widely questioned by experts, as it is based on unreliable estimates using even less reliable baselines (Sana'a Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021). According to the new UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs (until recently the UN Special Envoy to Yemen) in August 2021 'about 5 million people are just one step away from succumbing to famine and the diseases that go with it. Ten million more are right behind them. Famine isn't just a "food problem"' (OCHA, 2021). There is no doubt that the humanitarian situation has been bad and getting worse for the last four years, in particular with respect to people's ability to obtain the food they need for survival. However, neither the UN nor any Yemeni power holder has declared a famine, and it is doubtful that such a stage has been reached. Regardless, the humanitarian situation is disastrous and primarily the responsibility of the Yemeni politico-military leadership, the regional coalition members, while the internationally financed humanitarian sector has failed to fully prevent widespread hunger.

What excuse do the Yemeni leaders on all sides have? Discussing the issues involved in the food security crisis requires addressing many aspects (Mwatana and GRC, 2021). First, why does a country with 70% of its population living in rural areas need to import 90% of its basic staples? This makes it extremely dependent on international markets and price fluctuations. Partial explanations are addressed in Chapter 3: in particular, Yemen's population has almost trebled since unification in 1990, from 11 to 30 million in 2022, and it continues to increase at a rapid rate. This means that agricultural holding sizes are decreasing; climate change and the water crisis are also reducing cultivable land and yields. The neo-liberal development policies implemented by the Yemeni government and encouraged by the international community failed to address food security as a priority. Instead of investing in rain-fed improved staple crops and new high value crops, support was given to wealthier farmers to cultivate bananas and mangoes for export, both of which are very thirsty crops. Moreover, they are mostly grown using deep well irrigation and thus further contribute to the exhaustion of the country's limited

DOI: 10.4324/9780429059315-1

fossil aquifers. These shifts have reduced Yemeni self-sufficiency in staple crops to insignificance.

Dependence on imports for basic staples has been a problem for Yemen since the beginning of this century, but the war has worsened the situation dramatically as a result of the complete blockade imposed intermittently by the Saudi-led coalition since 2015. This affects Hodeida and other smaller ports on the Red Sea which have direct access to the parts of the country where the majority of the population live, including those in remote mountain settlements. These areas are under Huthi control. Therefore, for imports to reach these isolated communities, fuel, food and other necessities must travel on difficult tracks and roads. An essential ingredient is, of course, money, whether from earnings, remittances or humanitarian assistance. Most of the attention given to the activities of the Saudi-led coalition has focused on air strikes on civilian facilities and events, but its actions in preventing and controlling the flow of remittances, food and fuel has played a far bigger role in the country's death toll, estimated at 377 000 by the end of 2021. For example, in March 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) deplored that not a single fuel ship had been allowed to dock in Hodeida for a full two months and 350 000 metric tons of fuel were held off the coast. Monthly fuel requirement is 544 000 tons. Restricting fuel imports to Hodeida has a number of outcomes, including far higher prices for all commodities and increased profits for traders involved, as well, of course, as worsening living conditions for the people (ACAPS, 2021).

The actions of the Central Bank in Yemen (CBY), based in Aden and under the control of President Hadi's internationally recognised government (IRG) is another important element contributing to the current humanitarian crisis (see Chapter 3). Having run out of hard currency, in 2018 Saudi Arabia provided it with USD 2 billion to provide guarantees for Yemeni traders to purchase food on international markets. As of early 2021, these funds were exhausted and importers experienced complex problems. Renewal of this facility is highly unlikely for two main reasons: the financial constraints suffered by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) due to increased need of financing for internal development projects and the Covid-19 pandemic on the one hand, and on the other hand the fact that the dissident Southern Transitional Council (STC) is preventing the CBY in Aden from operating effectively under the authority of the IRG.

Yemen's unique social structure

Among Yemen's unique characteristics in the Arab world is its social structure (Lackner, 2019a, pp. 190–209). There are indeed some similarities with the south Asian caste system, including that of being far more flexible than formal principles allow. The vast majority of Yemenis are tribal people, either members of tribes structured into broader and larger confederations, or members of small tribal groups which have limited, if any, affiliation

to broader entities. No accurate data are available, but it is estimated that approximately 70% of the country's population are tribespeople. There are two main tribal confederations north of Sana'a, the Hashed and the Bakeel; in the centre of the country, the Madhaj is a looser confederation; the Yafi' are further south; and the Awlaqi are in the south-east. In the areas without major confederations, tribes are smaller and have lower levels of social cohesion. In the Taiz area, many people claim that there are no tribes, regardless of reality. Denial of tribal affiliation, a characteristic of 'modern' educated elites, usually only lasts until the need for community solidarity emerges, either to deal with personal crisis or to address conflict.

Anti-tribal prejudice is widely shared not only among urbanised and educated Yemenis but also by the wider international community, where discussion often focuses on the debate about the relationship between tribe and state (Peterson, 2021). As the most numerous and traditional arms bearing group, tribespeople are the dominant group in Yemen, though they do not always control politics. In the past the *sada* (sg *sayyed*) group was politically dominant in Sana'a. Officially direct descendants of the prophet, the imams in Sana'a were all *sada*, and the main ideological belief of the Huthi movement is that this group has an innate right to rule. They are widely accused of working to bring back the imamate and rule by *sada.* Indeed, in the areas which they govern, *sada* are widely privileged, including taking the majority of senior positions, though Huthi leaders deny planning the return to an imamate.

Traditionally ascribed status provided the country's social hierarchy, with the *sada* holding the top positions as religious and judicial authority. In most parts of the country the *sada* have traditionally needed the protection of arms-bearing tribesmen; however, nowadays some have taken up arms. *Quda* (sg *qadi*) are the main learned group working as judges and administrators; their status has become inherited over the ages though it was not originally ascribed. The merchant class were below tribes, *sada*, and *quda*, but the last half century has brought about a complete change as they became the main holders of wealth and also industrialists, thus improving their position in practice and allowing them to reach the higher levels of the hierarchy. There are low status groups defined as weak: they include artisans whose position varied according to their occupation. The lowest ranking was given to two groups who share the characteristic of being darker skinned: they included both former slaves who ranked above those who now prefer to be called 'marginalised' or *muhamasheen* and are still widely known in Yemen as *akhdam*.

These traditional inherited statuses remain important and are indeed reviving in the areas under Huthi control, given their determination to reassert *sada* dominance. Over the course of the past half century, considerable changes have taken place in practice. A new social structure is emerging based on wealth and access to resources, rather than circumstances of birth. Those who have monopolised wealth and power through the privileges given by the Saleh regime to his cronies have become dominant, and include

military security personnel from Saleh's area, as well as the big traders and industrialists. There is a significant overlap between the formal hierarchy and the new one. Most people's current status depends more on their differing levels of control over resources and political power, and a class structure is emerging (Lackner, 2016b, pp. 6–13).

Sects and sectarianism

Some discussions of Yemen wrongly attribute its problems to sectarianism. As a general rule, what is presented as religiously based political conflict is in fact based on political differences, using interpretations of religion to support different political interests (Alwaday and Shuja Al-Deen, 2021). Yemen is no different. Yemenis are Muslims: the country has two major sects which, until very recently, lived in harmony – the Fiver Zaydi Shi'a (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1) whose theological differences with the Sunni Shafi'i group are minimal. Followers of both schools pray together, and their differences are not a significant social marker. Zaydis live in the northern highlands, from the Saudi border to approximately Yarim (excluding the Tihama Red Sea coast and the more desert-like areas in the east). The rest of the country is populated by Shafi'is, with a small minority of Ismailis west of Sana'a in Jabal Haraz area and a few dispersed elsewhere. People in the former YAR certainly noted that all the presidents in Sana'a were also Zaydi (but of course leaders in Aden were Shafi'i), so in the Shafi'i areas ruled by Sana'a, there was a perception of anti-Shafi'i discrimination at the political level; but, given that most leaders were from the majority tribal group, this did not become a fundamental issue.

However, as Chapter 2 discusses, sectarianism is gradually developing as a result of Ansar Allah (the official name of the Huthi movement) introducing and strengthening 'Twelver' Shi'a practices. This process is designed to strengthen political control by differentiating its movement from others through the establishment of religiously based collective identities and allegiances. Given enough time, this may well create a sectarianism which was previously absent in Yemen. Although these practices help bring together their followers to build their movement and increase support, they are also likely to worsen divisions and cause further fragmentation among Yemenis.

Organisation of the book

As others in the series, this volume focuses on developments in the last century, with the first chapter addressing the country's history and state formation. It outlines the main political characteristics of the two states which united in 1990 to form the Republic of Yemen (RoY), both republics, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) aligned with the West during the Cold War and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) which was the only Arab state with close relations to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the

quarter century of the RoY's existence prior to the war, the state developed formal institutions and held elections. The chapter also outlines some of the features that led to the war.

Chapter 2 discusses the various factions and parties which have been the main political institutions since the RoY was established and their relevance to the origins of the war. It also examines the role of Ali Abdullah Saleh as the main personality affecting Yemen's contemporary history and politics, as well as the rise of the Huthis and southern separatism in the decade preceding the outbreak of the war. It concludes with analysis of the main internal forces active in the war, as well as the importance of the leading international members of the coalition, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the reasons for the lack of achievements of UN mediation.

Chapter 3 presents the natural constraints on economic development with particular attention to the current and future impact of climate change, focusing in particular on water scarcity, an issue of greater long-term relevance to Yemenis than the current politico-military one. Analysis of economic development policies points out the convergence of the internationally supported neo-liberal agenda with the political priorities of the Saleh regime and contributes to explaining why poverty is such a fundamental feature of Yemen's development. The changes in international migration patterns and possibilities also explains the people's widespread poverty. The war economy is a continuation of the earlier neo-liberal policies with new participants but basically worsening social differentiation between a small minority of Yemeni and other profiteers at the expense of the majority.

Chapter 4 covers Yemen's relations with the outside world, giving priority attention to relations with its main neighbours, whose lasting role in Yemeni politics and society is unavoidable, and moving outwards to include its relations with the world's most powerful states. The book concludes with the prospects for a post-war Yemen and an assessment of the main economic, political and social factors which will influence the future nature of the country, both internal and international.

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